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Accommodating Travelling Showpeople in England

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Historically, Travelling Showpeople have sought to distance themselves from the wider Gypsy and Traveller population, on the basis of their unique occupation and travelling patterns, but also based on a discourse around self sufficiency. This article explores how this distinction has been influenced by, and has influenced, policy developments relating to accommodation. It focuses on how this distinction has created a degree of exclusion in terms of accommodation needs, and how this impacts on the position of contemporary Travelling Showpeople, particularly in a time of changing travelling and employment patterns.

Keywords: Travelling Showpeople, Gypsies and Travellers, accommodation needs, exclusion.

Introduction

‘You lot are gypsies’. To a showman this is like comparing a Sikh to a Muslim. (Association of Independent Showmen, 2000)

There is an extensive body of literature and research exploring different aspects of the lives of Gypsies and Travellers within the UK, ranging from socio-historical background (Okley, 1983; Kenrick and Clark, 1999; Clark and Greenfields, 2006), through to specific issues such as health (Van Cleemput and Parry, 2001; Parry *et al.*, 2004; Van Cleemput, 2007) and education (Bhopal, 2004; Derrington and Kendall, 2007). In addition, following the *Housing Act* (2004), there has been an increasing focus on the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. This Act placed a duty on local authorities to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers and develop strategies for meeting identified needs. Consequently, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) have been carried out across England.

This broad classification of ‘Gypsies and Travellers’, however, hides a diverse range of communities, including Romany Gypsies (mostly English but also Scottish and Welsh), Irish Travellers, New Travellers, Roma, bargees or boat dwellers and Travelling Showpeople (which also includes Circus People). The heterogenous nature of Gypsy and Traveller communities thus reveals the difficulties in attempting to analyse their situation as a whole (Clark, 2006).

It is the last community – Travelling Showpeople – who are the focus of this article. Travelling Showpeople ‘total some 21,000–25,000 people’ (Clark, 2006: 17). They are mainly self-employed business people whose distinctive way of life is based around their primary occupations – operating travelling funfairs (Travelling Showpeople) and circuses (Circus People). Modern funfairs developed from entertainments associated with charter fairs, which have been held in towns and villages across Britain for hundreds of years. Indeed, many current Travelling Showpeople families have operated fairgrounds and travelling shows for generations, providing rides and catering on particular ‘circuits’ each year (Greenfields *et al.*, 2007).

Traditionally, Travelling Showpeople use three kinds of sites:

- fair sites, where they stay beside stalls/rides, whilst the fair is running;
- pull-ins, where they stop whilst travelling between fairs; and
- permanent sites or yards (Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight Strategic Housing Officers Group, 2008: 12).

The permanent sites are often referred to as ‘winter quarters’, where Travelling Showpeople stay when not touring, which has historically been between the beginning of October and the end of March the following year. As well as accommodating Travelling Showpeople families, these winter quarters are also required to accommodate business vehicles and equipment.

Taking the example of Australia, Travelling Showpeople have featured in a number of studies ranging from exploration of cultural identity to educational aspirations, experiences and opportunities (Danaher, 2001; Moriarty *et al.*, 2005; Danaher *et al.*, 2006). In the UK, while they have featured in historical analysis (see for example, Toulmin, 1999, 2003) and educational research (Jordan, 2000; Kiddle, 2000), there is little known about contemporary Travelling Showpeople. This article therefore has two main aims. Firstly, it will explore how Travelling Showpeople have sought to distance themselves from other Gypsies and Travellers – forging an identity firmly grounded in their occupation but also around self-sufficiency – and how this distinction has ‘played out’ in policy terms, particularly in relation to accommodation provision. Within this, it will explore how Travelling Showpeople are today negotiating their everyday lives and future needs within the context of changing employment and travelling patterns, specifically the growing requirement to occupy ‘winter quarters’ throughout the year. Secondly, and more broadly, it seeks to illuminate the lives of a community that still remains relatively hidden, despite their heritage and appearance within the cultural fabric of many of our cities, towns and villages.

This article is based on the reflections of the authors over five years of research with Gypsies and Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople. It draws upon fifty-seven interviews with Travelling Showpeople families across three separate Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs).¹ The interviews were carried out by the authors and a trained ‘peer interviewer’ from the Travelling Showpeople community. The interviews were guided by a questionnaire which contained a number of structured and semi-structured questions with the purpose of quantifying the accommodation shortfall and understanding various accommodation-related support needs. The Travelling Showpeople who participated in this research ranged from twenty-five to eighty-five years of age. In terms of gender, three quarters of the interviewees were male. The sample

included a number of families who had older children living with them (ranging from seventeen to thirty-nine years of age).

Travelling Showpeople are not included in the biannual count of Gypsy and Traveller caravans carried out by local authorities each January and July. The sample frame for this research is, therefore, yards of which the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain or the respective local authorities were aware.

In addition to the data generated through primary research, this article also draws upon meetings with representatives of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain that took place during the GTAAs, as well as reviews of parliamentary debates and other documentation relating to Travelling Showpeople.

Forging a distinct identity: the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and exemption from planning policy

A key feature of the identity of Travelling Showpeople is that the great majority belong to an organisation known as the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. The Showmen's Guild was established to protect the interests of its members – Travelling Showmen – who earned their living through the operation of fun fairs (Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 2007). There are ten regional sections to the Guild, with specific members in each section dealing with issues such as planning, education, safety, etc.

The development of the Guild in the 1880s was a direct result of the proposed Moveable Dwellings Bill. This Bill aimed to curtail the movement of *all* travelling people and included measures such as registration of all moveable dwellings, compulsory schooling of children and increased powers of inspection of dwellings. The establishment of the Guild was a strategy deployed in order to create a distinction between what was constructed as 'honest hardworking Showpeople', who travelled out of economic necessity and whose business interests would be harmed by such a Bill, and the discourse surrounding other Gypsy and Traveller populations – that endures to this day – around 'dirt' and 'criminality' (see for example O'Nions, 1995; Bhopal and Myers, 2008).

The United Kingdom Van Dwellers Protection Association – the precursor to the modern day Guild – started a campaign fund, held meetings and sent petitions to government in opposition of the Moveable Dwellings Bill (Kiddle, 1999). According to Mayall (1988), the campaign of the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Protection Association was efficient and effective in its opposition. However, in 1908 an attempt was made to resurrect the Moveable Dwellings Bill, which acted as an impetus for the mobilisation of Travelling Showpeople once again. Recognising the effectiveness of joint action, they renewed their defensive tactics, and the Association was reconstituted as a trade protection association for Showpeople (Downie, 1987). Indeed, since 1917 the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain has been recognised as the trade association of the travelling funfair business. It is accepted at national and local levels as the negotiating body for Travelling Showpeople: at a national level, it contests legislation that discriminates against members through a parliamentary agent; while at a local level, delegated officers are called upon to represent members' interests (Downie, 1987).

That Travelling Showpeople succeeded in distancing themselves from Gypsies is evident from the proceedings and debates around the re-introduced Moveable Dwellings Bill. A House of Lords Select Committee established to consider the Bill heard evidence from the Showmen's Guild and, when reporting in 1910, identified two main classes of

van dwellers: 'the showmen class and the gipsy class' (House of Lords, 1910: para 1, cited in Mayall, 2004).

Showing similarities to distinctions made between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, the use of language in relation to the two classes is striking. For example, when discussing Travelling Showpeople, the Select Committee report notes that:

The trade is perfectly honest and respectable and its members well-to-do, and in some cases even thriving. No grievances arise against them ... (House of Lords, 1910: para 1)

While in contrast, 'gipsies' were felt to have:

rather primitive views as to rights of property, especially in respect of what grows or moves upon the earth ... and stick cutting, poaching and petty pilfering are common among them. (House of Lords, 1910: para 4)

Indeed, with regard to Travelling Showpeople, in the subsequent House of Lords debate, the intention was signalled to:

endeavour to word the order so as to interfere as little as possible with the legitimate business of what is a considerably organised and well-conducted body of men [Showmen]. (Lord Clifford of Chudleigh on the Movable Dwellings Bill, see House of Lords, 1911)

In the event, this Movable Dwellings Bill was not enacted. However, permissive powers for local authorities to control 'nuisance' from movable dwellings and to license land to be used as sites for movable dwellings were finally introduced in the *Public Health Act* of 1936. In this Act, there were provisions that members of 'an organisation' could be exempt from licensing as long as that organisation could satisfy the Minister that camping sites belonging to, or used by, its members were properly managed, kept in good sanitary condition and did not give rise to any nuisance (OPSI, 1936: section 269(6)). This Act signalled the beginning of explicit exemption of Travelling Showpeople from legislation, based on their identity as an independent and organised group.

The *Town and Country Planning Act 1947* (OPSI, 1947) – one of the major pieces of legislation introduced by the Labour Government in the early post-war period – required planning permission to be sought for 'development', which included the development of land for use as caravan sites. The post-war housing shortage, however, had led to the widespread use of caravans as accommodation for members of the 'settled' community (that is non-Gypsies and Travellers) who could not find alternative accommodation. Caravan sites could be set up relatively easily in breach of this new planning legislation and pre-existing sites were outside its control. A report by Sir Arton Wilson in 1959 estimated that about 60,000 non-Gypsy caravans were being used as homes in England and Wales (Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MoHLG), 1959). The report also raised widespread concerns about sanitary and living conditions on caravan sites, highlighting the perceived ineffectiveness of controls available through the 1947 Act (OPSI, 1947) and the previous *Public Health Act 1936* (OPSI, 1936).

The legislative response to these concerns was the *Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960* (OPSI, 1960), which among other measures, required planning

permission to be sought for existing caravan sites and introduced site licensing by local authorities for caravan sites. Once again, parliamentary debates around the Act illustrate the way in which Travelling Showpeople were presented as distinct from other caravan dwellers, as well as the positive discourse regarding Travelling Showpeople and the Showmen's Guild. The following quotations, for example, are taken from the Second Reading Debate of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Bill (House of Commons, 1960):

Mr Hughes: I do not think that the special interest of the travelling showmen of this country should go unmentioned. This is a reputable section of the caravanning community ... I am glad to see that travelling showmen are among the exemptions.

Mr Deer: I am pretty sure that we can find a form of words to help these people. They are estimable citizens. I do not know of any section of the community that has done more for charity than the Showmen's Guild.

Schedule 1 of the 1960 Act exempted Travelling Showpeople, who were members of an approved organisation, from the requirement for a site licence for land used while travelling in the course of business (that is while running fairs) and 'winter quarters'. It is clear that such arguments increasingly framed Travelling Showpeople as 'different' from other Travelling populations by way of their 'respectability' and therefore as 'deserving' members of the wider community.

It is not the purpose of this article to explore the discourse around travelling fairs; however, it is interesting to note that they have, at times, been constructed as 'dangerous' and places where young people are enticed into engaging in undesirable behaviours (see for example, Miers, 2003.)

Exemption leads to accommodation 'exclusion'?

Thus far, the construction of Travelling Showpeople as 'respectable business people' was beneficial in distinguishing them from Gypsies and Travellers, and providing exemption from legislation concerned with controlling caravan sites and, indirectly, the lifestyle of travelling communities. The 1960 Act had, once again, set Travelling Showpeople apart from other caravan dwellers, to the perceived advantage of Showpeople. This distinction also imposed an implicit legal interpretation of their accommodation needs, based on a singular notion of the behaviour and labour patterns of Travelling Showpeople (i.e. the tradition of 'winter quarters' and summer travelling). As Hunter (2003: 324) notes, 'Specific identity constructions operate as markers of users' entitlement to services.' Thus, for Travelling Showpeople, entitlement was based on this distinct labour/accommodation pattern: behaviour and labour patterns that were *outside* this set identity and model would therefore not be exempt.

Furthermore, while exemption from particular aspects of legislation was beneficial, this has arguably contributed to a parallel process of exclusion from support to address accommodation shortfalls. For example, as part of the *Caravan Sites Act 1968*, local authorities had a duty to provide sites for travelling communities who were seen to be living in or resorting to their areas. This duty – supported after 1980 by government funding – led to the creation of a network of over 300 local authority Gypsy and Traveller

sites providing serviced pitches to Gypsy and Traveller licensees, which were broadly the equivalent of council housing for members of the settled community. However, the definition of 'gypsy' for the purposes of the Act specifically excluded Travelling Showpeople. Furthermore, Travelling Showpeople were not referred to during any of the debates around the Caravan Sites Bill. Indeed, it was not until much later that the Department of the Environment Circular 22/91 (Department of Environment (DoE), 1991) set out the planning policy towards Travelling Showpeople, making clear that 'The aim should be to help the showpeople to help themselves' (DoE, 1991: para 14).

This emphasis on the self-sufficiency of Travelling Showpeople was highlighted further in the conclusions of the report by the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs (2000), which called for the Showmen's Guild to establish their own planning committee.

The contemporary situation of Travelling Showpeople

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs)

In 1994, the Conservative administration repealed the local authority duty of the *Caravan Sites Act 1968* to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers, issuing a planning policy circular with provisions very similar to those in the earlier Travelling Showpeople Circular (22/91) emphasising 'self-help' through the planning system (DoE, 1994). By the early 2000s, it became clear that self-help was not working and a series of reports identified a growing shortfall of suitable sites for Gypsies and Travellers (Niner, 2003; Crawley, 2004); however, these reports did not consider the needs of Travelling Showpeople.

The precise policy shift within England, which brought Gypsies and Travellers under the gaze of a growing number of policymakers, were the *Housing Act 2004*, the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004* and Circulars 01/2006 and 04/2007 (Brown and Scullion, 2010). These developments included a number of elements, but there was a fundamental message that local authorities within England had a duty to carry out Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) (Brown and Scullion, 2010). Following a policy review in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, a new policy framework emerged. ODPM Circular 01/2006, issued in February 2006, described how the new approach was to work, moving from a needs assessment to identification of land for Gypsy and Traveller sites in development documents (ODPM, 2006). However, as with previous policy, the definition of Gypsies and Travellers, for planning purposes, specifically excluded Travelling Showpeople.

It was not until August 2007, following extensive lobbying by, and consultation with, the Showmen's Guild that a parallel Circular *Planning for Travelling Showpeople* (DCLG, 2007a) was issued. The Circular acknowledged that previous guidance (DoE, 1994) had failed to deliver an adequate number of sites for Travelling Showpeople. It therefore aimed to ensure that the system for pitch assessment, identification and allocation – as introduced for Gypsies and Travellers – was also applied to Travelling Showpeople. However, the delay in the publication of the Circular led to some uncertainty over the intended position of Travelling Showpeople within GTAAAs. Draft guidance on carrying out GTAAAs was issued in February 2006 before the final definition of 'gypsies and travellers' was finalised. The draft guidance did include Travelling Showpeople, but based this on assumed needs (i.e. 'winter quarters'). The guidance was issued in final form in October 2007 (DCLG,

2007b); however, given the initial delays and ambiguity, many of the earliest GTAAs failed to include the needs of Travelling Showpeople, while others included less detailed assessments of Travelling Showpeople than of other Gypsy and Traveller communities.

In addition, the Gypsy and Traveller Site Grant was made available to local authorities and registered social landlords for the provision of new sites from 2006/07 onwards, having previously been available for refurbishment of existing social sites. Again, there was uncertainty and delay over the position of Travelling Showpeople.

In general terms, the provision of accommodation that was established some time ago has not adapted to meet the socio-economic demands of the Travelling Showpeople population. This point was noted in a report by Power and the Lancashire Section of the Showmen's Guild (2007: 24):

One main problem for the Showmen is the regional nature of their work during the travelling season when they may have to be in several geographically diverse places in as many weeks. Of the 41 Northwest local authorities covered in the report, all of them sanction any number of funfairs that operate throughout the fairground season and have done for generations. But strikingly 26 of these local authorities have no accommodation provision whatsoever for Showmen ... the distribution of Showmen's combined accommodation and parking sites is disproportionately concentrated in a few centres in stark contrast to the broad regional spread of Showmen's fairs throughout the Northwest.

The GTAAs which included the needs of Travelling Showpeople thus suggest considerable unmet requirements for additional sites. The quotations below are taken from interviews with Travelling Showpeople and illustrate their concerns relating to overcrowding and a general lack of sites:

[The] population of Showpeople is growing, yet sites are disappearing. There used to be loads more than there are now. (Male Showperson, aged 50–59)

We're overcrowded in this yard. My children are growing up. In ten years we are going to have a problem here. (Male Showperson, aged 40–59)

However, similar to other Gypsy and Traveller communities, collective responsibility is very important (Greenfields, 2006), and Travelling Showpeople therefore expressed concerns about the ability to accommodate household growth but also extended families:

Showpeople, like all minority groups, like to live near to each other, for safety [and] to keep in contact with your family and friends. We still have family values and we're proud of that. That's why the yards need to be big enough for family and extended family. (Male Showperson, aged 60–74)

The fact that sites need both residential *and* commercial use creates difficulties in a planning system which likes to keep those land-uses separate, adding further complexity to addressing the needs of Travelling Showpeople. The shortage of sites sometimes meant that space allocated to business equipment had been sacrificed for additional residential space. Consequently, there were concerns about how this could affect the efficiency of the business:

We need more space to work and maintain equipment – it's our livelihood. If you can't work on your equipment that's your living affected. (Female Showperson, aged 25–39)

[There are] too many vehicles. [You] can't repair them in winter – you have to repair them on the road. (Female Showperson, aged 60–74)

Discussions with the Showmen's Guild and interviews with individual Travelling Showpeople suggested that, in the past at least, there had been a tendency amongst Showpeople to conceal their various accommodation needs. In part, this was because of a reluctance to bring severe overcrowding to the notice of local authorities in case this triggered action to enforce spacing standards. Travelling Showpeople – as business people – have an interest in keeping good relations with local authorities who license their funfairs and provide employment. It was apparent that they were wary of confrontations with local authorities (and members of local communities) due to the potential impact this might have on their business; this presents challenges and tensions in demonstrating their accommodation needs. In interviews, this was highlighted as one reason why relatively few Travelling Showpeople establish sites *without* planning permission, despite there being a shortage of sites and overcrowding on existing sites.

Indeed, representatives of the Showmen's Guild made a distinction between 'law-abiding' Showpeople and other Gypsies and Travellers involved in 'unauthorised development' of caravan sites without planning permission. So, while some Gypsies and Travellers have had their accommodation needs met through retrospective planning permission, Travelling Showpeople have tried to retain the 'respectability' discourse. Some interviewees questioned whether their strategy of doing things 'by the book' had, in some respects, left them in a less favourable position than other travelling groups, particularly in relation to buying land and following planning procedures. It was their perception that – in comparison with Gypsies and Travellers – Travelling Showpeople had been disadvantaged in terms of authorised site provision being made for them, with perceptions that they did not have equal access to resources, in terms of funding:

I think local authorities should provide funding to develop Showmen's yards; they do this for other travelling communities. (Male Showperson, aged 40–49)

We are overcrowded in this yard, my children are growing up, in ten years time we are going to have a problem here. I don't mind if the Council lend land to us, we need more places to live ... why isn't there funding available for Showpeople, they do it for Gypsies!? (Male Showperson, aged 40–49)

Beyond financial assistance, however, there was also a sense that they did not have equal access to the land that was currently available:

If honest, I would be off here tomorrow but can't find suitable land, we even offered to buy the Gypsy site in [area], the one that closed, but they told us we can't as they need somewhere for them to go. We want to buy somewhere but we can't find anywhere where they will give planning. (Female Showperson, aged 40–49)

So, while analysis of early debates suggest that Travelling Showpeople had welcomed being 'left out' of legislative measures, contemporary Showpeople appeared to talk more

in terms of exclusion. Indeed, a number of respondents were pleased that Travelling Showpeople had 'finally' been included in assessments of need:

I am happy to see this assessment includes Showpeople. Perhaps the Government should help to improve yards. We, as a cultural community, have never been included or considered for grants or funding for our yards or land. (Male Showperson, aged 60–74)

A changing way of life

Over the years, the pattern of work and site use for many Travelling Showpeople has changed (Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, 2007), with an increasing number of people remaining static throughout the year (Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 2007). There are a number of factors that have led to this changing pattern. There has been a decline in the prevalence of the fair and a lack of employment opportunities in this sector (ibid.). Furthermore, fair sites are available for a shorter time than in previous years – with landowners wanting fairs to run for a few days rather than a week – and often have less space for vehicles and equipment (Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight Strategic Housing Officers Group, 2008). This is coupled with the costs associated with fairground sites; for example, it is suggested that some landowners may charge up to £600 a day to be on site, even if the fair is closed (ibid.)

A number of interviewees indicated that they had begun 'commuting' to work in recent years. Indeed, the area of the fair business that has increased has been single-day events for communities, city centres and commercial hospitality events (ibid.). As one respondent highlighted:

Everyday I travel to work, but I have a refreshment kiosk, my home is static. (Male Showperson, aged 40–49)

I commute to work, I still have a business on the fairground, but I travel by car each day. (Male Showperson, aged 50–59)

In addition to the changes to the fair business, there is also an increasing aged population (Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 2007), and respondents made reference to the need to care for older relatives. Furthermore, schooling for children was an important factor. It was evident from the interviews carried out with Travelling Showpeople – in comparison to the interviews with other Gypsies and Travellers that were undertaken as part of the GTAA process – that Travelling Showpeople were more likely to be engaged in the acquisition of education, training and skills:

[The] main caravan stops on site permanently – lads in school. (Male Showperson, aged 40–49)

Children need schooling so [we] tend to commute to work. (Male Showperson, aged 40–49)

Consequently, Travelling Showpeople increasingly wished to occupy 'winter quarters' all year round, with the 'winter quarter' concept all but redundant for the most part. Policy-makers, however, have been slow to understand and respond to this changing way

of life and in many cases planning conditions still relate to traditional seasonal occupancy patterns which may no longer apply.

What is interesting, however, is that while GTAAAs have sought to label Travelling Showpeople as Gypsies and Travellers, the distinctions based on 'desirability' of one particular population over another was evident in the views and perceptions of some local authorities today. In one study area, for example, it was revealed by a representative of the Showmen's Guild that other Gypsy and Traveller communities would 'scope out' the Showpeople's yard in the spring to see if it was still occupied. This situation had led to an 'informal understanding' between the Travelling Showpeople and the local authority that some Showpeople families would be present almost permanently on that site. It was suggested that this understanding was based on the local authority's preference to have Travelling Showpeople occupying the site rather than other travelling groups using it as a temporary stopping place. Thus, the residents were deployed almost as 'unofficial security' for the local authority against more 'undesirable' members of the Gypsy and Traveller population. While the Showpeople clearly benefitted from this 'informal' arrangement, in planning terms, however, the yard remained classed as winter quarters and therefore did not officially provide security or stability for these families.

Conclusions

This article has sought to provide an understanding of the Travelling Showpeople community. While Travelling Showpeople have sought to distance themselves from the wider Gypsy and Traveller population, forging an identity grounded in their occupation and self sufficiency, the distinction – until recently – has arguably resulted in a degree of exclusion in terms of accommodation provision. Travelling Showpeople have, over a significant period of time, argued that they are in many ways different from other Gypsies and Travellers, who tend to receive far greater negative reactions to their existence. These distinctions have been made both in reference to their reason for living in movable dwellings, and also the cultural differences between the communities.

While the discourse of early policy developments appeared to suggest an understanding of differences between Travelling Showpeople and other travelling groups, there is a perception of a general ignorance of Showpeople's culture and needs on the part of both the public and policy-makers in contemporary debates, and confusions and comparisons with Gypsies and Travellers figure largely. Indeed, as one Showperson highlighted:

It's a pity there isn't more done to raise awareness of us. Our history as Showpeople goes back many generations. But you would think we were illegal immigrants sometimes. (Male Showperson, aged 60–74)

This corresponds with the findings of research carried out with Showpeople in Australia, which suggests that Showpeople have made ongoing efforts to 'set the record straight' in terms of educating local people on their distinct way of life, whilst at the same times highlighting what they have in common with 'local' people (Danaher, 2001).

It is apparent that Travelling Showpeople occupy multiple (and sometimes conflicting) positions, with tensions between attempting to maintain 'uniqueness', whilst at the

same time seeking equal access to resources (ibid.). To a certain extent, they have been disadvantaged by their attempts to differentiate themselves from other Gypsies and Travellers. There is now the potentially difficult position of negotiating contradictory arguments – on the one hand they want to maintain distance from ‘Gypsies’, while on the other they want their accommodation needs to be met and thus have had to engage in the wider needs assessment process. As one Travelling Showperson highlighted in an interview:

Showmen have always paddled their own canoe. That’s what it’s about, being independent, ‘I don’t need help’ attitude. Today we are trying to tread new ground. (Male Showperson, aged 40–49)

So, while Travelling Showpeople have previously emphasised self-sufficiency, contemporary Showpeople are increasingly aware that they require assistance – both in terms of identifying land and the planning process, but also in some cases financial assistance – in order to ensure that their accommodation needs are addressed.

The situation of Travelling Showpeople in the UK also provides an example of a population with an assumed set of needs (Zetter, 1991). As highlighted above, their identity has been constructed around self sufficiency, particularly through membership of the Showmen’s Guild. The danger for Travelling Showpeople is that policy-makers have taken that identity at ‘face value’, requiring self-sufficiency even when the (planning) system makes it almost impossible to exercise. At the same time, assumptions are made around summer travelling and the requirement for ‘winter quarters’. Such assumed needs, however, do not respond to the changing employment/accommodation practices of Travelling Showpeople, particularly the increasing call for year-round accommodation. Thus, the categorisation that has been relied upon is perhaps no longer able to tell us much about who the people are, what lives they lead or what services they need (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2010). More in-depth research would elucidate the lives of Travelling Showpeople. However, a key issue is ensuring that this understanding of contemporary Travelling Showpeople is reflected in the policy narrative.

Finally, although more recent legislation (and Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments) has aimed to ensure the inclusion of Travelling Showpeople, it is clear that this has not been consistent. That said, GTAAAs have provided valuable information on a little-known population, and a clear accommodation shortfall which is accompanied by specific land-use needs (i.e. space for equipment) has emerged from the recent research (see, for example, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, 2007; Greenfields *et al.*, 2007; Power and the Showmen’s Guild Lancashire Section, 2007). At the time of writing, however, the planning policy relating to Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople is being revised. A new draft circular has been issued for consultation by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which will replace Circular 04/07 (DCLG, 2011). If the draft remains unchanged, there will in future be no distinction at all between Travelling Showpeople and other Gypsies and Travellers in government guidance. Furthermore, under ‘localism’, local authorities are deemed as best placed to assess need and determine level of provision; however, they are not ‘bound’ by the accommodation short-fall already identified through the GTAA process (DCLG, 2010). Thus, the extent to which accommodation needs will be met – for *any* Gypsy and Traveller communities – is currently uncertain.

Note

- 1 To ensure confidentiality no specific geographical location will be referred to.

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